

## How PLCs Improve Schools

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### An Overarching Assertion

- A growing body of research indicates that the most promising strategy for *sustained, substantive school improvement* is developing the capacity of school personnel to function as a *professional learning community*.

## **What Do We Know About the World's Best School Systems?**

The best school systems in the world recognize that the quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers. The only way to improve outcomes is to improve instruction.

So, high-performing systems use the professional learning community process to support powerful professional development through teacher collaboration (Barber and Mourshed, 2007).

## **What is a PLC?**

## Professional Learning Community (PLC) Defined

- The professional learning community is an ongoing process in which educators work collaboratively in recurring cycles of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve.
- PLCs operate under the assumption that the key to improved learning for students is continuous, job-embedded learning for educators.

## The 1st BIG IDEA of a PLC


- We accept *learning* as the fundamental purpose of our schools and therefore we are willing to examine *all* practices with regard to their impact on learning.



Because we accept learning as the fundamental purpose of our schools, our collective effort must focus around four critical questions:

- What is it we want all students to learn?
- How will we know when each student has learned?
- How will we respond when some students experience difficulty in their learning?
- How will we enrich and extend the learning for students who are proficient?

## The 2nd BIG IDEA of a PLC



We are committed to working together to achieve our collective purpose. We are cultivating a collaborative culture through the development of high-performing teams.

## Because we are committed to working collaboratively to achieve our purpose . . .

The collaborative team is the fundamental building block and engine of improvement in our schools.

We work together interdependently to achieve common goals that are directly related to improved student learning.

We are mutually accountable for achieving those goals.

Teams are provided with the time, resources, and support essential to their effectiveness.

## The 3<sup>rd</sup> BIG IDEA of a PLC

- We are assessing our effectiveness on the basis of results rather than intentions. Individuals, teams, and the school seek relevant evidence and information and use that information to promote continuous improvement.

**Because we assess our effectiveness on the basis of results rather than intentions, we look at evidence of student learning to:**

Inform and improve the professional practice of individuals

Inform and improve the professional practice of the collaborative team

Respond to students who are experiencing difficulty

Respond to students who need enrichment.

## **The Three BIG IDEAS of a PLC**

**1. We accept learning as the fundamental purpose of our school and therefore are willing to examine all practices impacting learning.**

2. We are committed to working together to achieve our collective purpose. We cultivate a collaborative culture through development of high-performing teams.

3. We assess our effectiveness on the basis of results rather than intentions. Individuals, teams, and schools seek relevant data and information and use that information to promote continuous improvement.

**If We Implemented What We  
Know to Be Best Practice . . .**

Schools would be organized into collaborative teams in which members work together *interdependently* to achieve *common goals* for which members are *mutually accountable*.

**If We Implemented What We  
Know to Be Best Practice . . .**

Teacher-developed *common formative assessments* would be the cornerstone of the assessment process in every school.

## Common Assessments. . .

Monitor the learning of students who are expected to acquire the same knowledge and skills.

The assessment uses the same instrument or a common process that use the same criteria for assessing the quality of student work.

## The Case for common Assessments

Common assessments are consistently used by schools with the greatest achievement.

They represent a powerful, proven structure for improved results.

They enable educators to diagnose student learning needs in time to make instructional modifications.

They form the basis of professional dialogue in schools.  
(*Learning by Doing* pp. 194-95)



## The Case for Formative Assessments

When developed through teacher learning communities, formative assessment promise the largest potential gains in student achievement.

Few initiatives in education have had such a strong body of evidence to support a claim to raise standards.

They are one of the most powerful, high-leverage strategies for improving student learning.

They are one of the most powerful weapons in a teacher's arsenal (Learning by Doing, p. 193)

## Keys to a Formative Assessment Process

**To determine if an assessment process is formative ask:**

- Is it used to identify students who are experiencing difficulty in their learning?
- Are students who are having difficulty provided with additional time and support for learning?
- Are students given an additional opportunity to demonstrate their learning?

## Linking Formative and Common Assessments

“Two strategies seem especially promising for schools. One is to expand the quality and variety of formative assessments; a second is to promote and organize collective inquiry into and discussion of student progress and achievement based on a range of assessments.”

– Judith Warren Little, (2006), *“Professional Community and Professional Development in the Learning-Centered School,”* p. 9

## The Most Powerful Strategy for Improving Student Learning

- Teachers work together in collaborative teams to:
  - *Clarify what students must learn.*
  - *Gather evidence of student learning*
  - *Analyze that evidence*
  - *Identify the most powerful teaching strategies.*
- Reflective teaching must be based on **evidence of student learning**, and reflection is most powerful when it is collaborative.

(John Hattie, Visible Learning: A Synthesis of Over 800 Meta-Analyses Relating to Achievement , 2009)

## Why Common Assessments?

Impact on professional practice--the irrefutable evidence of better results and the positive peer pressure of a collaborative team working interdependently to achieve a common goal provide the most powerful levers for impacting practice.

Efficiency—by sharing the load, teachers save time.

Equity—promotes a guaranteed curriculum, similar pacing, and consistent standards for assessing student proficiency.

## Why Common Assessments?

Informs individual teacher practice—provides teachers with a basis of comparison regarding the achievement of their students so they can see strengths and weaknesses of their teaching.

Builds team capacity--collaborative teacher teams identify and address problem areas in their program or teaching.

Collective response--helps teams and the school create timely, systematic interventions for students.

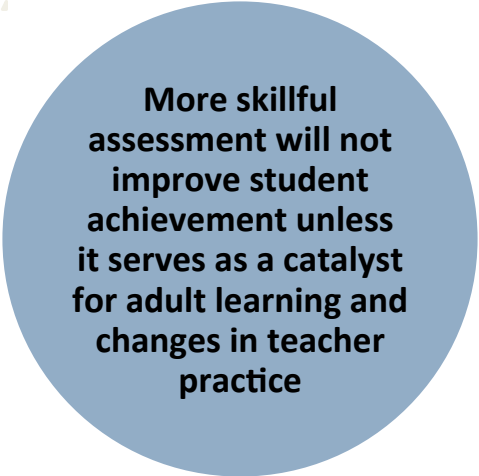
## **What we Know Versus What We Do**

**In most schools, assessments will continue to be developed and administered by individual teachers and will be used primarily for summative purposes.**

## **An Important Caution**

**If we are to realize the potential of assessment to improve schools, we must acknowledge that merely helping individual teachers become more skillful in assessing student learning does not guarantee they will improve student learning.**

## Effective Assessment



More skillful  
assessment will not  
improve student  
achievement unless  
it serves as a catalyst  
for adult learning and  
changes in teacher  
practice

## It Comes Down to Changes in Behavior

The central challenge and core problem of all substantive change initiatives is **changing people's behavior**. Change efforts must focus on what people do and the need for significant shifts in what people do.

(John Kotter and Dan Cohen, *The Heart of Change: Real-Life Stories of How People Change Their Organizations*, 2002)

## What Might Motivate a Teacher to Change Practice?

- Pointing out that students in other classes are earning higher grades?
- Having the principal visit the class to evaluate her teaching and suggest changes?
- Sending her to a workshop on using different teaching strategies?
- Enrolling her in a graduate course to student different teaching strategies?
- Poor student performance on a test?

Writing Scores	
STUDENT	SCORE
1	4
2	3
3	4
4	1
5	4
6	2
7	4
8	4
9	2
10	4
11	2
12	2
13	4
14	2
15	1
16	4
17	2
18	2
19	2
20	4
MEAN SCORE	2.9
*Target Score 3/4	

## We're Okay. . .They're Not Okay

- According to the 2009 Met Life survey of teachers in the United States, 84% of teachers are “very confident that I have the knowledge and skills to enable all of my students to succeed academically.”
- According to that same survey, only 36% of teachers believe all their students have the ability to succeed academically.

STUDENT	FOCUS ON TOPIC				ORGANIZATION/SUPPORT				SENTENCE FLUENCY/WORD CHOICE				CONVENTIONS			
	CLASS 1	CLASS 2	CLASS 3	TOTALS	CLASS 2	CLASS 3	CLASS 4	TOTALS	CLASS 2	CLASS 3	CLASS 4	TOTALS	CLASS 2	CLASS 3	CLASS 4	TOTALS
1	4	3	4		2	2	4		3	2	4		4	4	3	
2	3	4	4		3	4	3		3	4	4		3	4	4	
3	4	4	4		4	3	3		4	3	3		2	4	4	
4	1	3	3		1	2	2		2	3	4		2	4	4	
5	4	2	4		2	2	2		3	2	3		3	3	4	
6	2	4	3		1	3	3		1	4	3		3	4	3	
7	4	3	3		3	4	2		3	4	2		4	3	3	
8	4	2	3		2	2	3		3	2	3		3	3	3	
9	2	2	3		4	1	2		4	1	2		4	3	2	
10	4	4	4		3	3	3		4	3	3		4	3	3	
11	2	3	3		3	2	3		3	2	4		3	3	3	
12	2	3	3		2	3	3		3	3	4		4	4	4	
13	4	2	3		3	2	2		3	2	3		4	3	3	
14	2	4	3		1	4	2		3	4	3		3	4	3	
15	1	3	3		1	3	3		1	4	4		2	4	3	
16	4	3	3		3	2	3		4	3	3		4	3	3	
17	2	3	3		1	3	3		1	3	3		2	4	3	
18	2	3	4		2	2	3		3	2	4		3	4	4	
19	2	3	4		2	3	4		2	4	4		3	4	3	
20	4	2	3		3	1	2		3	1	3		4	3	2	
AVERAGE	2.9	3	3.4	3.1	2.3	2.6	2.8	2.6	2.8	2.8	3.3	3	3.2	3.6	3.2	3.3

## **Concrete Evidence of Irrefutably Better Results**

- Teachers have to feel there is some compelling reason for them to change practice, with the best direct evidence being that students learn better. The key to enduring change in teacher practice is demonstrable results in terms of student achievement (Richard Elmore, 2003)
- Transparency of results creates an aura of positive pressure—pressure that is actionable in that it point to solutions and pressure that at the end of the day is inescapable (Michael Fullan, 2008)

## **The Power of Positive Peer Pressure to Bring About Change**

- Positive peer pressure is a powerful and accessible tool to influence the behavior of others. The approval or disapproval of our colleagues can do more to assist or destroy a change effort than any other source (Patterson et al, Influencer: The Power to Change Anything, 2008)
- There is both peer pressure and peer support in collaborative organizations. People stand out if they are not contributing and therefore are inspired and motivated to contribute (Fullan, Michael: Leading in a Culture of Change, 2001.



## **Focusing on the RIGHT Work**

- After two years of teachers working in collaborative teams to clarify essential outcomes and discuss preferred instructional strategies, none of the schools in this longitudinal study showed any gains in student achievement
- In the 3<sup>rd</sup> year, teams created common assessments and used the results to discuss which strategies were effective and to identify areas and students needing the team's attention. Every school experienced dramatic gains in student achievement for three consecutive years.

(Gallimore, et al, 2009)

## **Use Common Formative Assessments to Improve Professional Practice**

**Common formative assessments created by collaborative teams of teachers are uniquely suited to contribute to adult learning, changes in teacher practice, and higher levels of student achievement.**

### To Impact Professional Practice, Ensure All Teachers:

- Receive timely and frequent feedback on the achievement of their students
- Meet to agree upon standards
- Agree with valid, team-developed common assessments
- In *comparison to others*
- Use evidence of student learning to explore effective instructional practice.

### How Should a School Respond When Kids Don't Learn?

- *Ensure* a student receives *increased levels of time and support* in a manner that is:
  - *Timely*
  - Increasingly *directive* (not invitational)
  - **SYSTEMATIC**

### **Systematic Intervention: By Name and By Need**

- **The most effective schools and school systems in the world monitor and intervene at the level of the individual student. The best systems take the process of monitoring student learning and intervention inside schools, constantly evaluating student performance and constructing interventions to assist individual students in order to prevent them from falling behind.**